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Select Tale.

[From Peterson's Magazine.]

MEETA CARR.

A LEAF FROM A BACHELOR'S NOTE-BOOK.

BY MISS ALICE GRAY.

I NEVER saw two people that seemed so 'made for each other,' as did Meeta Carr and my friend Job Talfourd. One rarely thinks of such a thing in reference to persons that have never been brought together, but the first time I saw Miss Carr, as her head appeared above the ship's side she was climbing, I felt that Job's Venus had risen from the depths of the sea. I wished that he was there. It was a gala-day. The vessel was to be christened, and notwithstanding his name, Job was well-fitted to play his part in such a scene. I suppose his godfathers and godmothers had to answer for the rounds of imprecations he bestowed upon his cognomen. He always wrote himself J. Talfourd, and considered it a personal insult for any one to ask what the initial represented.

It is a wonder that I did not fall in love with Meeta Carr myself that day, for I never saw any being so beautiful as she broke the bottles of wine; but I had a previous engagement. I became an intimate friend of hers, however, a frequent guest at her uncle's splendid house in Fourteenth street; sat by her at dinner-parties, feeling all the charm her grace and tact lent to her deep toned thoughts and feelings, and danced German quadrilles with her at midnight. The men, without exception, worshipped and flattered her, and she seemed, by a sort of chemical analysis, to separate whatever there was of truth or sincerity in their compliments—that only, she received; all felt that the rest floated down the stream. She had none of those little nets and lines by which many women gain admiration. It took well—this gay indifference. The conservatories were ransacked for choice bouquets for her; and her door was besieged with anonymous presents, which were straightway locked up in a dark closet.

It was almost as exciting as champagne to study daily such a deep heart and mind. And the sparkles were not wanting. Some were flashed from Meeta's pride, which would admit very few into the penetralia of the sanctuary—the exception in my favor a great compliment therefore. Another was that she never looked upon me or behaved toward me as if there was any probability of my ever becoming her lover.

But in talking to Miss Carr, one now and then seemed, if I may so express it, to come to the bottom of affairs unexpectedly. You could not say it was too soon, but it was when you had thought a fresh fount of feeling just opening. I discovered the reason of this by the merest accident. Meeta Carr hed no idea of religion, hardly of a God. I do not mean that she was an Atheist, neither had she the easy creed of the world. But the sentiment, the feeling, even in its most general form, was not in her. She told me, with wonder at my wonder, that the idea of a Disposer of all things had never once entered her mind till suggested by some one else. She could talk and think of a future life, but the thought of a God ruling over the present, with whom she had any connection, could find no foothold in her mind. I tried to rouse a feeling that I thought must only slumber, but in vain. She would look at me calmly and smile. One day I concluded an eloquent burst. 'Do you understand me, Meeta?' I asked.

'No,' she quietly replied.

I desisted after this, but wondered that such a lack was not more visible, and that it did not extend itself farther.

When our party was made up for Newport in the summer, I wrote to Job Talfourd to meet us there. In common with every one else, he was dazzled with Miss Carr, and at once devoted himself to her. The drives and polkas he begged for were granted far more freely than to older acquaintances, his flowers were worn, his instructions at the bowling-alley accepted, &c.

One day I was praising him to her, when she said quietly, 'I do not understand your friend. Tell me his peculiarities.'

'I think his character easily read,' I answered, watching him closely, with the exception of a sensibility as tender as a woman's. He is a poet, as you may have discovered, and has perhaps indulged too freely in the license of genius; but you ladies will like him the worse forthat."

As we rose to go in—we had been sitting on the piazza in the moonlight—Job suddenly came up the steps. I looked quickly around at Meeta. Her face was quiet, but I saw she was holding her breath to keep the color from rising. I felt convinced that she had undertaken to win Talfourd's heart—undertaken it with all a woman's wilfulness, the more quickly because she saw it would be difficult. Yes, the proud beauty, so disdainful of admiration and homage, would change her character and bearing, and try all ways of winning devotion. Strange inconsistency! Fain would I have her more help, but I too was puzzled with Talfourd. He went too far not to go farther.

Late that same night, I was walking down to the beach with him, when he suddenly collared me exclaiming: 'Do you love Meeta Carr?'

'What the deuce do you mean?' Hands off,' I replied, shaking myself clear.

'Do you love Meeta Carr?'

'Do you?'

'Yes—no—I don't know.'

'Say no then. Meeta Carr is not a woto be loved with a hesitation.'

'I know it.' After a pause he continued, 'you have not answered my question. You have been playing a part. You love Meeta Carr and she loves you.'

'Have a care, Talfourd, what you say. I have not the patience of your namesake.'

'Namesake be hanged.'

'I will answer you in plain words. I do not love Miss Carr, and never shall,'

'And why not?'

'I deny your right to ask the question.'

'Is she not worthy of being loved?'

'Aye! nobly, sincerely.'

'Has she not a true heart?'

'Truer than you think; with feelings far more deep and underlying than you have any idea of.'

There was a hop the next night. How radiant Meeta looked! She was dressed in white, her skirt caught with bunches of ivy-leaves, and a garland of the same twined in her glossy curls. She wore a splendid wreath on her bosom, reaching from shoulder to shoulder, which a little marred the symmetry of her costume, but I fancied and afterward learned, that it was Talfourd's gift. He did not come until late, and then only said a few words to her, and devoted himself to a little, blue sylphide from Philadelphia. I noted the fierce pang of jealousy that shot through Meeta's heart. All that evening she eagerly tried to attract his attention. She who before had scarcely deigned to accept!

Satin slippers were beginning to look soiled and frayed, when he relinquished her hand after the single dance he had asked that evening. I saw the feverish expression in her eyes. Suddenly she extended her arm in a strange manner, I thought, and her bracelet lay broken at his feet. He raised it, and asked permission to have it mended. She haughtily refused. He seemed nettled at this, and turning hastily left her without a word.

The ball was breaking up. I heard Talfourd make engagements for meeting the little girl in blue, at the bowling-alley the next morning, and also to drive her on the beach at six. Miss Carr had refused several invitations for the beach in hopes he would ask her. I joined her in the embrasure of a window. The music ceased, and we heard the melancholy roar of the sea. The night looked dreary without. There were tears in Meeta's eyes, and I knew the fast-thinning ballroom looked dreary through them. I half wished Talfourd would approach, but Meeta knew better. She knew that a ball room is no place for woman's most subtle weapon. The next moment she looked up from her drooping wreath with an easy smile, 'I believe my mother is waiting.' Oh, smiles and flowers and jewels, how much do ye hide! Was hers the only aching heart in that Newport ball-room that night?

Dancing, flirting, promenading, manœuvring, ten-pins, fast horses, sherry-cobblers, moonlight *tete-a-tetes* and Polka Redowas went on at Newport. Well for those who had not put their heart on the game! I beheld with wonder the transformation of my friend Meeta Carr. Her quick and practised tact prevented others from seeing anything in her actions but the caprice of a petted beauty. She had a constitutional fear of horseback exercise. I had once seen her, after many solicitations, tremblingly allow herself to be placed on the back of a steady, old worn-out Rosinante, but at his first step she turned deadly pale, and but for assistance would have fallen fainting from the saddle. Now Talfourd greatly admired a lady equestrian. On this account she determined to conquer her dread. But her riding lessons were hours of torture. She often returned to her room with a headache for the day. She learned to ride with grace, as she did everything else, but never without a palpitating heart, and a sigh of relief on dismounting.

Talfourd was a wonder to me as well. His behavior to Miss Carr was always distant and reserved, and yet he almost constantly sought her society.

'Lawrence, I leave Newport to-morrow,' he said to me one day.

I was not surprised the next evening to hear Miss Carr announce to her bevy of admirers, that the time set for their return to the city was the beginning of the next week.

Again in New York, her trial to win Talfourd's love continued. I knew that her mornings were passed in close study of the German metaphysical works he loved, and urged upon her. She had no fancy for such things, but still would dim her bright eyes poring over them when she longed to be abroad in the breezy October noon.

All at once she stopped and drew back. She was cool and smiling as a snow-drift. Was it jealousy? I had seen that passion urge her to the putting forth of all her powers. Had she concluded it hopeless? No, the change would not have been so sudden. I watched her for a week and learned the explanation. She had a poor cousin, plain and delicate, to whom Talfourd's feeling heart had made him show many attentions. He would bring her the lingering flowers of autumn, move her chair to a sunny window, reach her a fire-screen, tell her the gossip of the town, and in a thousand nameless ways cheer the poor girl's existence. These things Meeta had understood and admired, but one day she saw him pick up a bunch of faded chrysanthemums that lay beside the piano, and conceal them in his bosom. They were Laura's, and she stood aghast. God forbid that she should come between that poor girl and a love that would be to her as the one ewe-lamb of her life! With all the direst generosity of her nature, she began at once to crush back her feelings. I even reverenced her as I looked on her trembling lips and calm brow. With another, even her proud spirit would have struggled, but with her poor, sick cousin—no! Talfourd saw her anxiety not to eclipse Laura in his presence, saw that she had misinterpeted his attentions, and took care that she should do so no more. The incident of the flowers was accidentally explained—he had thought them hers. Her proud spirit was laid open before him, and by her own generosity. And so it was that meeting at a bridal reception, after a month or two more of eager trial and heart-burning on Meeta's part, Talfourd said, in the most every-day manner,

'Ah! Miss Carr, I am glad to see you here, for I should have only had time to leave my P. P. C's at your door. I am going abroad.'

Meeta went through the suitable surprise and regret. 'When do you sail?' she inquired, calmly.

'On Monday. I will not say good-bye. *Au revoir.*'

Each took a smiling and careless farewell.

Before Talfourd sailed, I discovered that he had found out Meeta Carr's great defect.

The birds had sung the new music of two spring-times to the skies of America, blue as those of Italia—twice had the forest fairies of the New World kissed every branch and stem with their loving and glowing lips, while Talfourd and I wandered in 'foreign parts.' I had joined him in the Levant, and we had travelled over the East together. We had got back to Paris again, and found it ringing with the beauty and grace of a young American girl. At the opera, a few nights after our arrival, we observed a sudden stir and raising of glasses. '*Voila,*' said said the enthusiastic young Frenchman, who had been gabbering to us of large, wondering eyes, and pearly teeth, and exquisite shoulders. It was Meeta Carr.

The next morning we called upon her and she had much to tell of the events of two years. The great sorrow of her life had fallen upon her. Her mother had died very shortly after my departure. For a moment I hoped that grief had led her to look to a higher power, but alas! no! Her lame brother's health had bro't her with her uncle to Europe. To this child, the last of her immediate family, she clung with idolatrous tenderness.

I knew there was little food for the hope that glittered through her downcast eyelashes when she spoke of Talfourd; and Paris was of all places the last in which to indulge it. Frivolous and perhaps heartless as French women may be, they are most of them unaffectedly religious, and this without the embarrassment and secrecy in it which distinguish Protestants. Poor Meeta!

I was hardly prepared for her passionate turning away from all homage to seek that of Talfourd. Paris was at her feet. Men of the world, scholars, military men, noblemen, poets, pursued her with exquisite gallantry, delicate flattering attentions; but she sent them down the wind as if not worthy of a thought. Oh! how many arts love taught her, and how day by day her feelings grew more eager, her heart sickness more intense. She did nothing unmaidenly, nothing forward, but it seemed as if her feelings could not be repressed. Talfourd was too absent-minded to be a very close observer, but I thought he must see this. Many an irascible Frenchman looked at him with a muttered '*sacre,*' as his own attentions were repulsed for those which Talfourd offered with such a strange, variable, uncertain manner.

Summer drew on, and the Baths of Lucca were recommended for little Charley Carr To my surprise Talfourd insisted upon going thither also.

'You had better stay where you are,' I said. 'Do you know what you are doing?'

'What do you mean?' he asked.

'You understand me. I do not wish in such a connection to speak the lady's name even to you?'

He looked offended and turned away. The next morning he said, 'I am going to Italy when the Carrs go. You can come with me or not as you choose.'

'But Talfourd——'

'If you wish to continue your last night's remarks, Lawrence, you must excuse me. We will not resume that subject at this or any other time.'

I knew Job did not get his temper from the land of Uz, so I said no more.

At the Baths the same scene was reenacted. There was much company there, and Meeta queened it over all. The impressible Italians raved about her. There was a wealthy English nobleman, one of the most striking men I ever met, who would have given half his fortune to bear back such a bride to his velvet Westmoreland glades. I did hope that some one would succeed in diverting Meeta's regards.

'This is my first and shall be my last attempt at match-making,' said I to myself. 'How much would I give if I had not begn the means of bringing Talfourd and Miss Carr together.'

As I better read Meeta's passionate heart, I feared she would break through conventionalism, and throw herself upon Talfourd's compassion. How much pride had she already cast aside for him!

The Baths of Lucca are 'located,' as a Yankee would say, in a narrow valley, on both sides of which the rise is abrupt. There are many lovely hill-side walks. One day I came upon my two friends seated beneath the shadow of a spreading chestnut. Meeta's uncle, who had been her companion, had strolled farther up the mountain. Talfourd was trying to sketch the drooping arch of her eyebrow. Failing in the attempt, he began tracing over the original with the corner of a card, 'to get his fingers into the way of the curve,' he said. Suddenly stopping, he pressed the card to his lips, and replaced it not in his pocket, but in his bosom. Meeta sat still with her usual grace. I found myself *de trop.* Miss Carr's manners, however, had lost their former *retenu.* They had become restless and impetuous. Foreigners thought nothing of it, but she would not have been as much admired in England as formerly.

At the next ball given by the duke, Talfourd was constant at her side, and hanging upon his words, she seemed scarcely able to spare a thought for an attempt to veil her preference. She secretly watched his eyes to guide her in every little particular.

Talford and I occupied a sitting-room in common. As I was pulling off my pumps that night I heard him leaping up stairs. He dashed across the room without a word and bolted himself into his bed-room. The next morning he asked me in a melancholy, but firm tone, if I was ready to go with him to England. And so the day of our departure was fixed for the next Wednesday.

On Tuesday there was a sketching party made up. We wandered about for some hours, Talifourd hovering near Miss Carr with wistful looks and silent, sad attentions. Our cloth for a late dinner was laid upon the grass. Poor little Charley Carr sat at the head in high glee. He had been carried up in his chair, for his sister never could bear him long away from her.

The sloping rays were glimmering through the lovely chesnut woods. We were standing on the brink of a cliff watching the shadows creep up its sides, when we heard a sudden cry. Miss Carr sprang round the angle of the cliff and uttered a scream of horror. Her little brother had ventured on a ledge in quest of berries. The rock on which he had crawled had loosened and fell, and he barely had time to fling himself toward another crag, where he hung by his hands. All access to him seemed impossible. The precipice was almost perpendicular, and far below among the jagged rocks foamed a dark mountain torrent. What was to be done? The poor child looked up with a face of dumb horror. Talfourd's eye caught a jutting rock near, and he instantly threw off his coat. 'Let me go, signor,' said a Luccese peasant, who had been with us during the afternoon, 'I am used to these mountains. It were madness for you.'

The man instantly began to climb down the cliff. With suspended breath we watched his progress. He reached the rock, but the distance from the child was greater than he had thought. He could do nothing. Sick with disappointment, we looked in each other's faces. The man retraced his steps to reach another crag, from which grew a stunted tree. Carefully he began to climb out to the end of its branches. In the meantime, Charley had managed to draw his feet up on the rock, and crouched there, clinging to the matted vines. Meeta had been cheering and encouraging him, but now she covered her face. A German girl by her side breathed a low '*mein Gott,*' and she suddenly looked up with an expression I shall never forget—intense, puzzled, eager, wistful. Many an ejaculation of prayer was uttered aloud; and she looked from one to another, and then almost writhed in agony. *She had no God—no God to pray to!*

The peasant had now reached the outermost branch, from which he stretched down his athletic arm to the child who could just grasp his fingers. 'Climb up to my shoulder, so that I can get hold of you, can't you, my boy?' he said.

Poor Charley's lameness almost prevented this. He tried often vainly. 'The branch is parting,' whispered some one, as a loud crack was heard. The brave Italian cast one glance at the body of the tree, then at the abyss over which he hung. 'Signori, my wife and children,' he said, looking up; and then to Charley, 'once more—for life—for life!' This time he was successful, and the man's strong grasp was on his arm. One mighty effort, and he swung him clear of the overhanging crag, away above his head, to a broad rock whence many eager hands bore him to the top. The peasant had just time to get off the branch when the last fibre parted.

For a moment I thought the revulsion of feeling would absolutely strangle Meeta. Then she bowed her forehead on a rock near which she knelt, and her lips moved in thanksgiving to God. Yes, in that hour the heavens were opened for her. Her burden of gratitude forced her to scale them, for all earth flung it back. There was silence while she lifted up her awed and overwhelmed heart. When she rose, there was an altogether new expression on her countenance. She looked around on hill, and vale, and river, as if a new world had burst upon her.

I do not think she thought of Talfourd then, but his whole soul was laid at her feet. That one prayer had won—won what absorbed and wearying effort and affection had failed to do alone. Dizzy with emotion, her tottering steps were supported by his arm. There was no need of words. His whole being went forth to her with a passionate abandonment that could not but satisfy even her.

The brave peasant was generously rewarded, but I think he cared more for Meeta's tears on his hand.

What a delirium of joy glowed in my beautiful friend's eyes the next day!

'I thought we were to be on our way to England to-day, Talfourd.'

He looked at me as if I was wild—then laughed. 'Oh! I recollect. Well—I'm not going to England just now, my dear fellow.'

They were married in Italy, and Talfourd's ardent affection for his lovely bride was—I'll leave it too novel writers to describe.

ADVENTURE WITH A TIGER.

A still narrower escape for myself individually happened on another occasion, not long after this. I had gone to dine at salsette with Colonel Hunt, the Governor of the Fort of Tannah, about seven or eight miles from Bombay, and as I had an appointment at home in the morning, and the night was remarkably fine, with a brilliant moonlight, I declined the hospitable invitation of my host and hostess to remain with them during the night, and ordering my palanquin to be ready at ten o'clock, I left Tannah at that hour for Bombay. A great portion of the way was over a level plain of some extent; and while we were in the midst of this, the bearers, of whom there were eight, four to carry, and four for a relay, with two mussauljess. or lantern bearers, who carry their lights in the moonlight as well as in the dark, as a matter of etiquette which it is thought disrespectful to omit—in short, the whole party ot ten in an instant dissappeared, scattering themselves in all directions, and each running at his utmost speed. I was perfectly astonished at this sudden halt, and wholly unable to conjecture its cause, and my calling and remonstrance were in vain. In casting my eyes behind the palanquin, however, I saw, to my horror and dismay, a huge tiger, in full career towards me, with his tale all most perpendicular, and with a growl that indicated top distinctly the intense satisfaction with which he anticipated a savory morsel for his supper. There was not a moment to lose, or even to deliberate. To get out of the palanquin, and try to escape, would be running into the jaws of certain death. To remain within was the only alternative. The palanquin is an oblong chest or box, about six feet long, two feet broad, and two feet high. It has four short legs for resting it on the ground, three or four inches only above the soil. Its bottom and sides are flat, and its top is gently convex, to carry off the rain. By a pole projecting from the centre of each end the bearers carry it on their shoulders, and the occupant lies stretched upon a thin mattress, on an open cane bottom, like a couch or bed, with a pillow beneath his head. The mode of entering or leaving the palanquin is through a square opening on each side, which, when the sun or rain requires it, may be closed by a sliding door; this is usually composed of Venetian blinds to allow light and air, in a wooden frame, and may be fastened, if needed, by a small brass hook and eye, Every thing about the palanquin, however, is made as light as possible, to lessen the labor of the bearers; and there is no part of the panelling or sides more than half an inch thick, if so much. All I could do, therefore; was in the shortest possible space of time to close the two sliding doors, and lie along on my back. I had often heard that if you can suspend your breath, and put on the semblance of being dead, the most ferocious of wild beasts will leave you. I attempted this by holding my breath ar long as possible, and remaing as still as a recumbent statue. But I found it of no avail.

The doors were hardly closed before the tiger was alongside; and his smelling ane snorting was horrible: He first butted one of the sides with his head; and as there was no resistance on the other; the palanquin went over on its beam ends, and lay perfectly flat, with the cane bottom presented to the tiger's view. Thro' this, and the mattress, heated no doubt by my lying on it, the odor of the living flesh came out stronger than through the wood, and the snuffing and smelling were repeated with increased strength. I certainly expected every moment that, with a powerful blow of one of his paws he would break in some part of the palanquin, and drag me out for his devouring. But another butting of his head against the bottom of the palanquin rolled it oder on its convex top, and then rolled it to and fro like a cradle. All this while I was obliged, of course, to turn my body with the revolutions of the palanquin itself, and every time I moved I dreaded lest I should provoke some fresh aggression. The beast, however, wanting sagacity, did not use his powerful paws as I expected; and giving it up in despair, set up a hideous howl of disappointment, and slinked off in the direction from whence he came. Happily, he had entirely disappeared, and I was infinitely relieved. The next course to be considered was, whether I should get out and walk to Bombay, a distance of four miles, now near midnight, or whether I should again close my doors and remain where I was. I deemed this the safest plan, and remained accordingly; when, about half an hour beyond midnight, all my bearers returned, with several peons, or foot soldiers, and muskets, pistols, lances and sabres enough to capture and kill a dozen tigers; but these were too late to be of any use. They made many apologies for leaving me, but said that, as one of them would be certain of being seized by the tiger if they remained, and no one could say which, they thought it best that all should try at least to escape, and I readily forgave them; after which they bore me home with more than usual alacrity, and I enjoyed my repose all the more sweetly for the danger I had escaped.—*Buckingham's Autobiography.*

TAKING HIM AT HIS WORD— Can't phrases are dangerous, especially when employed in documents relating to business. Recently, a merchant, not so celebrated for the elegance of his diction as for the length of his purse wrote to his correspondent in a distant city, for a lot of flour, adding by the way of showing his impatience, that he wanted it "the worst kind." He was not less surprised than chagrined on the reception of the article, to find it full of weevil, sour and musty.

'Is that a lightning-bug in the street?' asked a short sighted old lady. 'No, grandma,' said a pert little miss, 'it's a big bug with a cigar.'